

Gorin no Sho

. . . rings as circles/levels or attitudes or the Five Rings of Buddhism, correspondingly Head, right Elbow, left Elbow, right Knee and left Knee, signify the Five of the Nito Ichi school of Musashi's Gorin no Sho. The first as Earth (*di*), the foundation, the Head, the map of the system with the *Hagakure* invoked immediately in one's desire, or lack thereof, for death, and further listing of nine edicts necessary to follow the Way, a term borrowed from the Buddhists but invoking, in this case, Confucian ethics, oddly starting *and* ending with the negation of advice, as in **"Do NOT think dishonestly"** then positive affirmations, concluding with **"Do NOTHING which is of no use."** Musashi's style here endures throughout the text of teaching then un-teaching, of mandating an action then repealing that action, of offering advice then revoking it. In fact, all the techniques offered in Water and Fire are loosely detailed and utterly useless for the kendo practitioner. So what is to be made of the Water (*shui*) chapter, also explained as Spirit, the changeable constant, where Spirit is *not* equal to Body, for neither should influence the other? Essentially, the only phrase remarkably without contradiction is **"your everyday Stance must be your combat Stance"**, which is difficult for the novice when engaged in mock combat, but easily comprehended when explained that their everyday Gaze must be their combat Gaze, to look not straight ahead but from the corner of the slits of their eyes, **"to perceive those things which cannot be seen"**. The Fire (*huo*) chapter could be viewed as the episode of acting which is later contradicted with the non-action of the Void, but within is given the purpose of writing down wisdom, of passing information through the oral tradition; however, both of which are surpassed by the process of TRAINING. **"This book is a spiritual guide"**, done and done. The detailed names of techniques, attacks, defenses with counter attacks are mere distractions, for the true Way of strategy is the **"craft of defeating the enemy in a fight"**, and who but ourselves is our greatest enemy?! The Wind (*feng*) chapter concerns style, tradition, the school, the limitations we place on how we are expected to move or think or feel based on previous learning modes. In fact, it is the very competitive nature of declaring one school is better or weaker than another, instead of desiring a collaborative effort between practitioners, for this competitive interaction, encouraged at sporting events, kumite tournaments, and boxing arena could be seen as the roots and continuation of the *us v. them* attitude prevalent in society leading to armed combat from one to 10,000 men. In the text, there is a critique of training halls (dojo/budokan), the place to study the Way or arts of war: **"When you learn indoor techniques, you will think narrowly and forget the true way"**. However, this is not to say one must simply go outside, but instead while training to take one's Inner

Nature and express it outwardly in concert with Outer Nature, to connect the two concepts of Nature instead of remaining hidden and scared practicing the indoor techniques for these are a distraction from the real purpose – the purpose which unfortunately remains unclear for many practitioners throughout their training, perhaps for their entire lives, until the act of *Munsen Muso* is discovered, not discovered but revealed, as *No Design, No Conception*. Found here is encouragement to **“hit with your body, and hit with your spirit and hit from the Void”**, without memorized techniques, without thinking of expected outcomes, (*do NOT anticipate – in neither the past/present/future*), without feeling anger, without overpowering, without succumbing, without thought. The essence of *Without* is detailed in the Void chapter (*wu/mu*) as in the Daoist *wuji*, the Illimitable, without limit out of which all things were produced, being empty without there have ever been a form to contain it, the *ness* of emptiness. All Musashi’s words can be reduced to one line, “You must study hard” also repeated as “the Way is in training”, not as in practice, for we as martial artists are engaged in practice on a daily basis, even when not in motion, but the training of how to practice must be taught, followed by material such as kata/techniques, although at the end of the path the Void must be embraced and unlearn the kata/techniques to reveal one’s honest martial intent, one’s real movement, one’s authentic nature, one’s true heart. And by embracing the Void, one can understand the Way by this example: Recall a moment when there is a pause in the flow of kata, when a technique is momentarily forgotten and we as practitioners draw upon a reserve of energy saturated in anger, announced with a *kiai*, and we are able to pass through this moment of hesitation. This we are taught in the Intro class, and with repetition through 450+ techniques and 28 katas, this robotic reaction become ingrained, becomes who we are as martial beings; yet we must unlearn for when this pause occurs and we React with anger, we must instead go blank, become the Void, and not in a pseudo-Buddhist, New-Age manner with burning incense staring-at-a-wall in meditation, but in *moving-meditation* without thought, without emotion, without respect to our appearance or the *sifu*’s expectations or especially our own expectations for the moment must pass, as is temporally mandated, and we must allow the anger or joy or praise or failure to pass through us as through existing in a Void, and behold: Peace emerges from this lack of attachment. To be empty is *not* to forget all we have learned from the System (White to 3rd Black), but it does mean we can let go of the knowledge, of the rudimentary memorization of foot/hand work, of the blood spilled by colleagues, of the anger and fear taken off the mat, of the ranking system and of the system itself. In essence, we must be constantly starting anew, daily wearing a pure white belt around a freshly creased gi, a beginner emerging from the Void with no past, no future, only life behind us and death before us, until we recall **“for spirit is Nothingness”**. . .

<< *Black Belt is Not a Test, but instead a Celebration!* >>